

THE READING EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

The Reading Excellence program was designed to provide children with the readiness skills and support they need to learn to read once they enter school; teach every child to read by the end of the third grade; and use **research-based methods** to improve the instructional practices of teachers and other instructional staff.

The primary activities are:

- Professional Development
- Tutoring
- Family Literacy
- Transition programs for Kindergarten students

The Act authorizes competitive Reading and Literacy Grants to **state education agencies**, which in turn distribute the funding to **eligible local education agencies** through a competitive process.

The REA targets the neediest children:

- local school districts that have at least one school in Title I school improvement status;
- districts with the highest or second highest percentages of poverty in the State; or
- districts with the highest or second highest number of poor children in the State.

The REA requires two types of subgrants:

1. Local Reading Improvement (LRI) subgrants provide professional development for teachers, purchase additional resources such as books and reading materials, organize early interventions for students having difficulty with reading such as one-on-one tutoring, and support family literacy activities, including parenting and adult literacy education. Approximately 90% of Montana's grant will be used to award these subgrants to eligible LEAs.
2. Tutorial Assistance (TAS) subgrants, districts and schools will provide for external and school-based tutoring opportunities for children with reading difficulties. Approximately 5% of the grant will be used to make at least one TAS award.

Montana will focus its \$10,912,187 on on-going professional development to change reading instruction in grades K-3. Local education agencies will conduct or participate in Summer Institutes (designed by CIERA and involving consultants such as Phyllis C. Hunter), and professional development for school staff led by a reading coach. There will be a professional development reading coach at each school. The on-site professional development will include: a school-based study group that will create a community of learners; opportunities for instructional staff to practice, observe, and be observed by peer teachers and the reading coach; regular and extensive individual work with the on-site reading coach; monthly formal professional

development programs on a broad range of issues such as assessment, instruction, or materials, coordinated by the reading coach; and opportunities to access training for teaching reading to American Indian students.

Montana's fourth graders as a whole had the second highest average reading score in the nation, however desegregated results for 1998 revealed that over 50% of American Indian students in Montana scored below the basic level. The majority of schools eligible for REA in the state have high populations of American Indian students. Montana has 36 eligible schools in 32 districts. Approximately 30 schools will be funded at an average of \$245,000 per school.